

Soldiers
Online

Writing and Shooting for Soldiers Magazine

Story by Gil High



What's in it for you?

WHILE writing stories or shooting photos for **Soldiers** won't make you rich, those actions will earn other rewards:

- Your work will be read or seen by thousands of readers, both through the printed pages of **Soldiers** and on the World Wide Web through **Soldiers Online**.
- The byline or photo credit you'll get for your work will loom large in any future portfolio.
- Your published work in **Soldiers** could lead to other, more lucrative, endeavors.
- You will earn the gratitude of your subjects, your readers (or viewers) and your editors (not to mention the admiration of your families and friends).

SPC Carrie Fotovich understands rejection.

An Army journalist currently assigned to U.S. Army Forces Command's 14th Public Affairs Detachment, Fotovich has submitted countless articles to **Soldiers** — and she admits to becoming frustrated as the only reward for her efforts turned out to be a pile of rejection letters from the editors.

But as she developed her writing skills and learned the importance of graphic support for her articles, suddenly her material was being published and the editors were contacting her to request articles on specific subjects.

"It was difficult initially," Fotovich said. "I really wanted my stories published in a widely-circulated publication. Now, I've learned what

editors are looking for, and as a result I'm more often published. It's very rewarding to see my stories in a publication and know they're being read by soldiers and civilians throughout the Army."

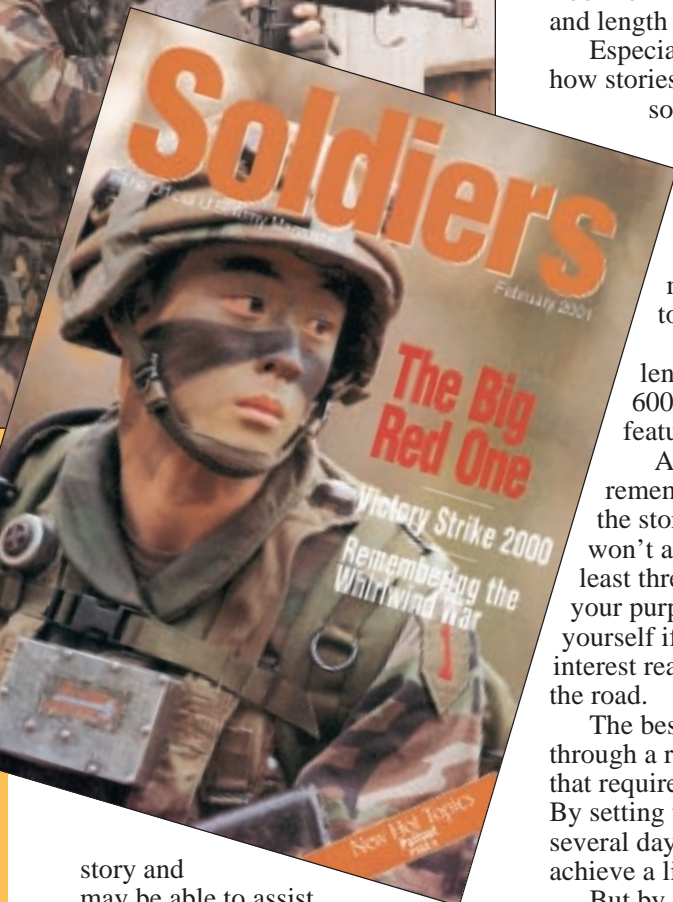
To improve her chances of being published, Fotovich also talks to editors to understand the publication's audience and how she can tailor her work to fit their needs.

As for **Soldiers**, Fotovich knows the magazine's editors will work with her as they do with all writers to develop good ideas into usable stories.

As editors, our first piece of advice to anyone with a good story is "contact your local public affairs office, where you can get help developing, refining and clearing your manuscripts before mailing them to us for consideration."

In fact we require that you get

PAO clearance for all stories that deal with unit activities or policy. Another reason to start with your PAO is because the editor of your post or unit newspaper may want to publish your



story and may be able to assist with photos, first edits and ideas about presentation.

Any article should begin as a good idea that is supported by a statement of purpose. This gives you a base from which to start and a visible goal to keep you on track. A purpose statement also helps you to narrow the subject, to keep it within workable limits and to test whether the subject has value to its intended audience.

Because this first step is so critical, feel free to call **Soldiers** for help. While we won't commit to using your work until we see the final product, we may make suggestions to improve your focus or even recommend additional articles to support your main story.

The next step is to begin research-

ing the subject. If you're writing about an exercise or event, of course, this means being there to interview participants and observe the activity.

But another part of research is knowing the publication and audience you're writing for. If that happens to be **Soldiers**, take time to read the entire magazine.

Notice that we rely heavily on photographs and descriptive captions. Look for literary style, subject matter and length of articles.

Especially study lead sentences and how stories are structured. Notice how some writers have pulled essential information from the main text to create shorter "boxed" pieces that are used to catch the reader's eye or make that information easier to find.

And notice that story length is actually very short: 600 to 1,200 words for most features.

Another important fact to remember about **Soldiers** is that the story you write today probably won't appear in the magazine for at least three months. So go back to your purpose statement and ask yourself if that message will still interest readers several months down the road.

The best articles are those that go through a rigorous rewrite, a process that requires distance and objectivity. By setting the manuscript aside for several days before rewriting, you achieve a little of both.

But by working with your PAO, you not only receive the benefit of a totally objective evaluation, you can also offer the story for use in the post newspaper.

The PAO can also work the manuscript through the chain of command if there is a question about policy or security.

Before mailing the manuscript to **Soldiers**, take time to properly package it. Begin with photos, making sure that each one has a complete caption that includes the photographer's name and rank.

Provide a hard copy of the text, plus a copy on disk in text-only or Microsoft Word format. Include a submission letter that contains your name, rank, duty position, an address

Soldiers Writing and Style Guide

THE **Soldiers** Writing and Style Guide is available online at www.dtic.mil/soldiers.

It contains information about **Soldiers'** mission and why we need your help to tell the Army story, instructions for captioning and sending photographs, and Army-specific terminology and exceptions to The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.

Another important feature is the "Contributor Tips" section, which provides critiques of published articles.

These comments discuss the strategies used by outside contributors whose articles have been published in particular issues of **Soldiers**. Studying the print or online versions of these articles with the aid of these reviews may help you understand our decision-making process and increase your chances of being published. — *Gil High*

and a phone number where we can call to verify facts or sources.

If you're going to vary from this package, or if you have questions, call the editors for assistance. This is especially true when you have to send stories and photos electronically.

Finally, continue to communicate with us. While we try to close the loop on every story we receive, two-way communication eliminates misunderstandings and clears barriers to speedier publication. □

Mail your complete publication packages to:

Senior Editor, **Soldiers** Magazine
9325 Gunston Rd., Suite S-108,
Fort Belvoir, VA 22060-5581

To discuss your ideas, call
(703) 806-4505 or (DSN) 656-4505,
ore-mail gil.high@belvoir.army.mil.

Check out
writing and photo tips
on pages 26-29.

Your Best Bet for Publication

How Soldiers can use your submissions

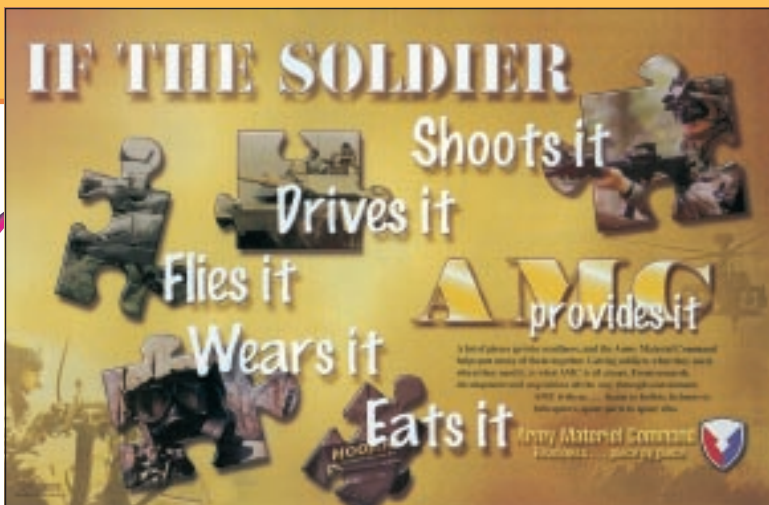


April 2000
Page 48

Training stories are first considered for use in our Postmarks department but are sometimes used as features. Feature material generally focuses more on unit missions or topics dealing with Army initiatives or policies.

October 2000
Page 29

Stories that contain minimal text and strong photographs are extremely versatile because they can be used in departments or be redesigned as short features.



April 2000
Pages 24-25

When a message can be told with few words, emphasized by dynamic photos, consider working with us to develop a centerspread pullout.



November 2000
Pages 4-5

Our series of division profiles will continue in 2001, and the editors have recently expanded the series to include stories about missions and activities at Army schools and installations.



December 2000
Pages 4-5

Photographs with strong leading lines and unusual angles draw readers into the story and communicate a message of their own.

November 2000
Pages 20-21

Stories focusing on Army history are often difficult to illustrate. Be sure to provide the best quality photos and graphics. It also helps to send these stories early to support specific events, in this case Veterans Day.



September 2000
Page 31

We're looking for stories on a large number of topics, including community support, quality-of-life issues, local environmental efforts, health and fitness, and much more.



Continued on
page 28



September 2000
Pages 32-33

Tightly written stories with a single good photo are excellent candidates for one of our departments. Most stories chosen for features are only slightly longer than department stories, but are distinguished by their subject matter or quality of photo support.

December 2000
Pages 26-27

Many seasonal or dated events, such as this annual winter carnival, are old news before they can be published in Soldiers. One way to overcome this disadvantage is to focus the story on next year's activities and submit your story early enough to act as an announcement of the coming event.



July 2000
Pages 36-37

Many post newspapers run photo features, but few editors forward those features for use in Soldiers. These dynamic photos are not only good candidates for our Sharp Shooters department, but also help support the "This Is Our Army" section of The Soldiers Almanac.



A Short Photo Course

A WELL-written story will communicate your message, but only if someone reads it. Photographs (or occasionally good supporting art) are as important as the words you write, because they attract the reader's attention to the story. They also reinforce the information contained in your story, and often tell a story of their own.

Your ability to provide good visual support is as important as your talent as a writer. Please note, however, that we didn't say anything about your ability to take pictures. What's most important is being able to imagine what visual elements will support your story and to know how to get them.

When thinking of visual support for your story, remember the following rules.

□ Think Action

The attention-getters are always the ones that tell a story on their own.

□ Think Vertical

You have to include horizontal shots, but remember that vertical photographs provide variety, and they're generally more forceful. They're also more likely to be used on the cover.

□ Think Variety

Select photos that indicate movement. Select photos that show the subject from the left and right, at high and low angles, in close-ups and at a distance.

□ Think Other Than Photos

A photo is usually best. But text can be broken into smaller pieces to run as attention-getting elements that provide essential information.

□ The Rule of Thirds

The exact center of a photograph normally is the least effective position for a subject. Picture impact is greater if the subject clearly dominates the photograph and is connected to its environment. In short, stay close to your subject but give it "room to move" in the frame.

□ Leading Lines

These are the lines of force that direct the viewer to the subject. Leading lines also communicate a mood. Horizontal lines put us to sleep. Vertical lines indicate strength. Diagonal lines create a feeling of movement. Curved lines create depth.

□ Shadows

Because military personnel wear headgear during most outdoor activities, too often their eyes or other features are lost in shadows. Select photos that make the subject easily recognizable, or use fill flash to bring out detail.

□ Distracters

Examine photographs for often-missed details: soda cans near the subject, leading lines that carry the viewer away from the action, distracting elements in the background, or flying aircraft whose rotors or propellers are standing still.

□ Uniform Violations

The photos you release are a reflection on your unit. If a good photograph illustrates a point, we may miss or disregard uniform or procedure errors in our enthusiasm to catch the reader's eye.

A Note of Thanks

WITH only two full-time writer-photographers on staff, **Soldiers** owes a special debt to those who continue to support the magazine by sending in their photographs and articles.

Last year, nearly half the content of our magazine came from outside contributors. In our feature section, 50 people, from sprawling training facilities to tiny outposts in the Pacific, contributed stories covering community activities, environmental efforts, Army transformation, well-being issues and much more.

A few people deserve special recognition. They include:

Sarah Underhill,
Soldier Systems Center,
Natick, Mass.;

PVT Travis Burnham and
PVT James Strine,
Fort Drum, N.Y.;

CPT Patrick Swan,
IMA, U.S. Army Reserve;
SGT Christopher Dunphy,
Fort Leavenworth, Kan.;

Renita Foster,
Fort Monmouth, N.J.;

SSG Amanda Glenn,
Special Operations Com-
mand, Fort Bragg, N.C.;

MSG Larry Lane,
1st Infantry Division,
USAREUR;

MSG Bob Haskell,
National Guard Bureau;

SGT Tami Lambert,
21st Theater Support
Command, USAREUR.